

Quick Facts

About... Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV)

What is RSV?

RSV causes respiratory illness mainly in children, but can infect people of all ages. In babies, young children, and adults with weakened immune systems, RSV may cause lower respiratory infection and pneumonia, and the infection may be very serious. In older children and healthy adults, the infection resembles the common cold. Most people are infected by age 2.

How is RSV spread?

RSV is spread by respiratory droplets from close contact with infected persons or contact with contaminated surfaces or objects. Infection can occur when RSV contacts the eyes, mouth, or nose, and possibly through inhaling droplets from a sneeze or cough.

What are the symptoms of RSV?

In babies and young children, symptoms include fever, wheezing, difficulty breathing, and pneumonia. RSV symptoms in older children and adults include moderate-to-severe cold-like symptoms such as fever, runny nose, cough, and sometimes wheezing. Symptoms generally appear about 2-8 days after infection.

How is RSV diagnosed?

See your health care provider. Your health care provider may review your symptoms and take a swab specimen of your throat or the back of your nose for testing at a laboratory.

How is RSV treated?

For mild disease, no specific treatment is necessary other than the treatment of symptoms (pain reliever, fever reducer). Patients with severe disease may require oxygen therapy or

hospitalization. Ribavirin aerosol may be used in the treatment of some patients with severe disease. Your health care provider can recommend the best type of treatment.

How can RSV be prevented?

- Wash your hands thoroughly and frequently, especially after coughing or sneezing.
- Do not share items such as cups, drinking glasses and eating utensils with persons who have RSV.
- Exclude children from schools and child care if they have respiratory symptoms and fever and limit contact with other children. Excluding children with colds or other respiratory illnesses without fever who are well enough to attend child care or school will probably not decrease the transmission of RSV. Almost 100% of children who attend child care get RSV in the first year of life.
- Promptly throw away any used tissues after coughing or sneezing.

When are outbreaks most common?

RSV outbreaks generally occur during the winter months (Nov. - April).

For additional information on RSV, please visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Web site at: <http://www.cdc.gov/rsv/index.html>

RSV is not a reportable disease in Indiana so there are no communicable disease reports available for this disease.

Last reviewed August 15, 2011 by ISDH Respiratory Epidemiologist